Volume 17 No. 8 December 2006

WORKS IN PROGRESS

ESTABLISHED IN 1990 BY THE THURSTON COUNTY RAINBOW COALITION

WHERE THE STREETS HAVE NO SAY

Selective enforcement keeps the homeless worrying about more than the yellow reign of patrons

Photo by Pat Tassoni.

by Wally Cuddeford

Recently, Olympia City Council members Jeff Kingsbury and Doug Mah co-sponsored proposed revisions to the city ordinances to discourage, what they call, "anti-social behavior" encountered downtown. The proposal would, among other things, make it illegal to sit, lie, vend, or solicit within six feet of the edge of a building. The proposal would only take effect within the downtown area, and has exemptions for people with disabilities, people waiting in long lines at businesses, and for people experiencing a medical emergency. Mayor Mark Foutch calls the new ordinance a "more certain tool to get groups of people to move along from in front of businesses or residences or other places where they've been harassing passersby and other people."

But this will not just affect the people who are committing the unwanted behavior. For those for whom the downtown area is home, the proposal is akin to an eviction notice. Having to sit at least six feet out from any business downtown puts one out under the elements. The proposal also outlaws begging for money (or as the proposal puts it, "aggressive panhandling"), an income staple for the homeless.

"Regardless of what's being said, it's going to affect the homeless," said Selena Kilmoyer, volunteer at Bread and Roses downtown, who recalled some of the history of the city's attempts to drive the homeless out of public spaces. "Two years ago, Sylvester Park was a big hub for the homeless. The State Police, enforcing the wishes of the business owners and others, basically cleared the park of the homeless. Then, they moved to the IT [Intercity Transit] station ... and with different techniques, the police drove them out of there too, and onto the sidewalks of 4th Avenue."

The co-sponsors of the new ordinance say it has nothing to do with the homeless. They say they are taking these actions because of repeated complaints from downtown patrons and businesses regarding lewd and threatening behavior on the part of unidentified people. Examples cited were public urination, aggressive panhandling, the blocking of sidewalks, and even the harassment and ridicule of people with disabilities.

Many people against the ordinance claim to have seen well-dressed bar patrons with cars urinating in alleys downtown.

Olympia resident Phan Nguyen claims to have been the target of racial epithets at Arts Walk and Lakefair. "Are you going to get rid of Arts Walk because someone had a bad experience [there]?"

The proposed ordinance does not address most of the undesired behavior that is cited, because most of the undesired behavior is already illegal. The proposal outlaws behavior supporters deem to be related, such as sitting on the public sidewalk, in hopes that it would deter the actual targeted behavior. But all the behaviors listed are staples of being homeless. In effect, the ordinance will criminalize the homeless for being homeless.

"I can empathize with business owners and the city council and law enforcement," Kilmoyer continues, "because they are extremely frustrated. But penalizing the poor is not the answer to this particular problem."

Many people spoke out in regards to the measure at the weekly City Council meeting on Tuesday, Nov. 21. The hearing was standing room only, with people massed all the way back into the lobby and out the door. A couple dozen or so people were stuck outside in the cold during the beginning of the hearing, because the building's authorized capacity had been reached.

> The ordinances are intended to give police the power to chase people out of downtown.

While well over 100 people signed up to speak at the hearing, only 82 people got their chance. 64 of those 82 voiced their opposition to the proposal. Many names, when called out, went unanswered. One individual pointed out that the Salvation Army's check-in time is 9:00, while the hearing lasted past 11:30, which suggests that many of those unanswered names were homeless themselves.

Many of the proposal's supporters said it has nothing to do with the homeless. Speaking of the undesired behavior, Mr. Foutch said, "There's no evidence that the people who were doing the kinds of things I described are, in fact, homeless or poor." Supporters maintained that their ire is directed at the "anti-social behavior," and not at the homeless.

Matthew Green, former City Council member, had a different take on the matter. "Of course this is targeted at poor people. That's why there's an exception for people who are about to go into a business and buy something. Of course this is not about behavior, because all the behaviors and all the crimes that were mentioned earlier tonight are already covered by other criminal ordinances. Of course this is not about blocking the sidewalk because the people [who write] angry letters to the editor don't write angry letters about how 'That dang sidewalk is blocked.' It's about who's blocking it."

Many people in opposition to the proposal held signs that said, "Downtown is for everyone." Some of the proposal's supporters tried to use that message by highlighting what they called "anti-social behavior" on the part of downtown loiterers. Their message was that, if something isn't done about this behavior, they won't feel comfortable going downtown anymore. Doug DeForrest, who spoke out in support of the ordinance, said "We have a right to be there without being panhandled ... or having comments made about us." Alternately, many people who opposed the new ordinance used the message of opposing "anti-social" behavior, saying that prohibiting people from being downtown is what's really "anti-social."

Opponents began picking away at the technicalities of the proposal. What about employees who are taking their breaks? What about the Salvation Army Santas? What about parents who are accompanying their children in lines for movie and concert tickets?

This brings us to the crux of the issue: selective enforcement. When people point out that patrons of businesses could be targeted by these ordinances, the general response from everyone is, "Well, of course *they're* not going to get kicked out of downtown."

This attitude betrays the notion that the proposed ordinances are intended to give the police the power to chase people out of downtown who are not there to patronize businesses, while leaving alone those who are downtown to spend money. Writing such a rich versus poor dichotomy into law would be a huge red flag for civil libertarians and advocates for the poor and could be easily challenged in a court of law. If such a rich/poor discriminative measure were to be enacted, it would have to be done in such a way where basic behaviors such as sitting down on a public sidewalk are made universally illegal, and the police are expected to enforce selectively, however they or their bosses wish.

And how would the police know who's an acceptable business patron and who's an unacceptable loiterer? Speaking for myself, I've been harassed by the police on occasion for loitering around in public spaces without buying anything. Never once did the police ask to see a sales receipt before they issued their ultimatum that I move. Somehow, they looked at me and just knew.

Mayor Foutch started the hearing by saying the sidewalk areas in front of downtown businesses have always belonged to the property owners, even though the public have maintained it for them since the mid-1850s. He has said that the public has since been "obligated to manage that right of way in the general public interest."

Many people at the hearing spoke of how much they love Olympia and its culture. But the culture of downtown Olympia is only maintained by the ability of people to exist, regardless of whether they are fueling money or work into local businesses. By outlawing the right of people to just *be* (regardless of their usefulness to the business sector), the Olympia culture people love would be strangled. The ordinance would, in effect, turn downtown Olympia into a shopping center, welcoming only employees and customers, with all the culture and uniqueness of Westfield Shopping Center. It's hard to call anything that receives such resounding opposition as being in the "*general* public interest."

Wally Cuddeford is an Olympia resident, US Navy veteran, and organizer with the South Sound Project for Military Resistance and Justice, and the Port Militarization Resistance.

Update: Anti-social sidewalk ordinance amendments pass

by Drew Hendricks

The Olympia City Council passed the amendments to the Sidewalk Ordinance Tuesday, Nov. 28, with Councilmember TJ Johnson voting against, and Councilmember Doug Mah absent.

Councilmember Laura Ware tacked on three amendments, setting an expiration for the ordinance on Dec. 15, 2007, pending renewal; allowing an exception for sitting or lying down in doorways between 10 pm and 7 am; and allowing "busking" (street performance) within designated areas, with a permit. Ware also secured a guarantee from the City Council to spend $200,000 to "fill gaps in services" to the homeless and poor.

Councilmember Karen Messmer added an amendment which specified that business furniture would also need to be clear from the walking zone (6 feet from the building) or have a special use permit. The law is slated to become effective on Feb. 1, 2007.

TJ Johnson pointed out that the law does not address public safety, and is extremely divisive. He recounted many names which were hurled at each side of the debate, and asked us to consider the common humanity in each other's views. Mayor Mark Foutch called for the vote and the measure passed 5–1.

There is already an exception (known as an "affirmative defense," one which must be used in court after one is arrested) for standing in line to buy a ticket. That's an interesting coincidence, since tickets to Olympia Copwatch's December 2007 Ball at the Eagles Hall will only be made available to people who are standing on an Olympia sidewalk. No one in a building will be sold the tickets, which will cost $1 in December 2006 and increase in price each month until December 2007. We're not trying to limit sales of tickets to persons by class, "we're just trying to reward acceptable behavior."

WORKS IN PROGRESS

Works In Progress is a free, volunteer-operated progressive community newspaper based in Olympia, Washington. Opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect those of *Works In Progress* and are solely those of the authors.

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Please send text as Word attachments. Artwork and photos can be sent electronically or we can scan them for you as camera-ready/black & white.

WIP reserves the right to publish in whole or part all submissions. For editing purposes, please enclose your phone number.

Articles may be reprinted. Please cite source.

If you don't see your issue being covered in Works In Progress*, it's because you aren't writing about it! (Or aren't finding someone else to cover it!)*

Send submissions to *wip@zhonka.net* or mail to Works In Progress, PO Box 295, Olympia, WA 98507-0295.

Governing Tool
The following statement is part of the Editorial Policy and is the governing tool for the Anti-Discrimination Clause:

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On the cover: A bunch of kids who need to get jobs. Or maybe it's...Critical Mass! Photo by Jon Huey. ***See story on page 4.***

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Documentaries: "Affluenza" and "Escape from Affluenza"

Sunday, December 3, 6:00 pm
Traditions Café and World Folk Art, 300 5th Ave SW

Free admission: $5-$10 donation appreciated.

This event is a sponsored by the **Alliance for Democracy**, South Puget Sound Chapter. The Alliance for Democracy is dedicated to restoring democratic authority over government and corporations, reviving grassroots democracy, and establishing appropriate limits on corporate influence. To find out more, visit **www.sounddemocracy.org**.

For more information, contact Jacqui at 360-236-9684 or jacquiAFD@comcast.net .

Homeless in Olympia: A community forum to educate, agitate, and organize

Wednesday, December 6, 7:00 to 9:00 pm
Olympia Community Center, Room B

The Olympia Movement for Justice and Peace will host a community forum on Homelessness in Olympia on Wednesday, December 6, 7 to 9 PM at the Olympia Community Center, Room B. This Forum is free and open to all. Childcare will be provided, along with meals courtesy of Food Not Bombs. **(See related articles and announcement on pages 1, 5, and 8.)**

Vigil on 4th Ave bridge for military resisters

Saturday, December 9, 12:00 to 1:00 pm

This OMJP-sponsored vigil is in solidarity with the **National Days of Action for Military Resisters** taking place around the country throughout the weekend of December 8–10. The purpose is to support military resisters and protest the war.

The themes that we are asking people to emphasize and bring banners and signs for are: Peace on Earth...now! Support Lt. Ehren Watada! The war in iraq is illegal! Justice for Suzanne Swift and other victims of command rape! 650,000 Iraqi deaths is too many! 3,000 American deaths in Iraq is too many! (By that weekend the number will be over 2900. The actual 3,000th death may well be on Christmas Day.) The American people have spoken! Not another life lost—American or Iraqi!

ArtWROC

Saturday, December 9, 6:00 to 9:00 pm
Sunday, December 10, 10:00 am to 6:00 pm
At Bryce's Barbershop, 118 4th Ave

ArtWROC is a celebration and sale of the work of local artists and crafters, and a fundraiser for the **Welfare Rights Organizing Coalition** (WROC). Buy unique gifts, enjoy local musicians and fabulous desserts, and possibly win and a handmade quilt in the raffle. WROC is a local nonprofit organization whose members are low income parents working for social and economic justice by education, empowerment and action. We can be contacted with questions or if you would like to donate art or music at 360-352-9716 or wrocoly@wroc.org .

Will we keep *Democracy Now!* on TCTV?

Please help us find community members interested in maintaining TCTV's airing of Democracy Now! It's hard to know who watches the program there, or who values having it available in that medium at 5 am and 4 pm. If you are one of those, OR if you might know someone who is, please rally them to help. Our local Media Island sponsors Democracy Now! on TCTV. Without community financial donations for the required expenses this successful, four-year, three-way collaboration will not continue past our 2006 contract with DISH Network. Ask around, will ya!? Are you one who can/will support this grassroots, independent, local media effort? Is your neighbor, hairdresser, grocery cashier, your accountant, your mother...? We still need only $135.
Send tax-deductable checks by Dec. 30 to: Sandia, MII, P O Box 7204, Olympia, WA 98507 with "DN!/TCTV" on subject line.
Questions? 866-4561.

Documentary: "Hacking Democracy"

Friday, January 5
Olympia Unitarian Universalist Congregation,
2200 East End Street NW

Hacking Democracy is a timely, cautionary documentary that exposes gaping holes in the security of America's electronic voting system. Bev Harris from **Black Box Voting** (www.blackboxvoting.org) will share her views from the voting security trenches. Electronic voting machines count about 87% of the votes cast in America today. But are they reliable? Are they safe from tampering? Watch the documentary and find out!

For more information, visit: **www.olyuu.org** or **www.sounddemocracy.org**

Support *Works In Progress* or the Olympia 22 and get a Toy Piano

Make a donation of $50 to *Works In Progress* or the Port of Olympia Legal Defense Fund (for the Olympia 22) and get 50 toy piano tokens, which you can trade for a toy piano at Last Word Books, Dumpster Values, or Fire & Earth while supplies last. Please indicate that you want toy piano tokens in your donation. **www.toypiano.org**

Works In Progress still urgently needs more help!

Can you help with content coordination, proofreading, distribution, or website management?

To find out how you can plug in, **join us Sunday, Dec 10, 4:30–6:00 pm**, at the "Studio" (the small building behind the main house) at **Fertile Ground Guesthouse, 311-9th Av SE**, Downtown Olympia.

Remember, only you can keep *Works In Progress* going another 16 years!

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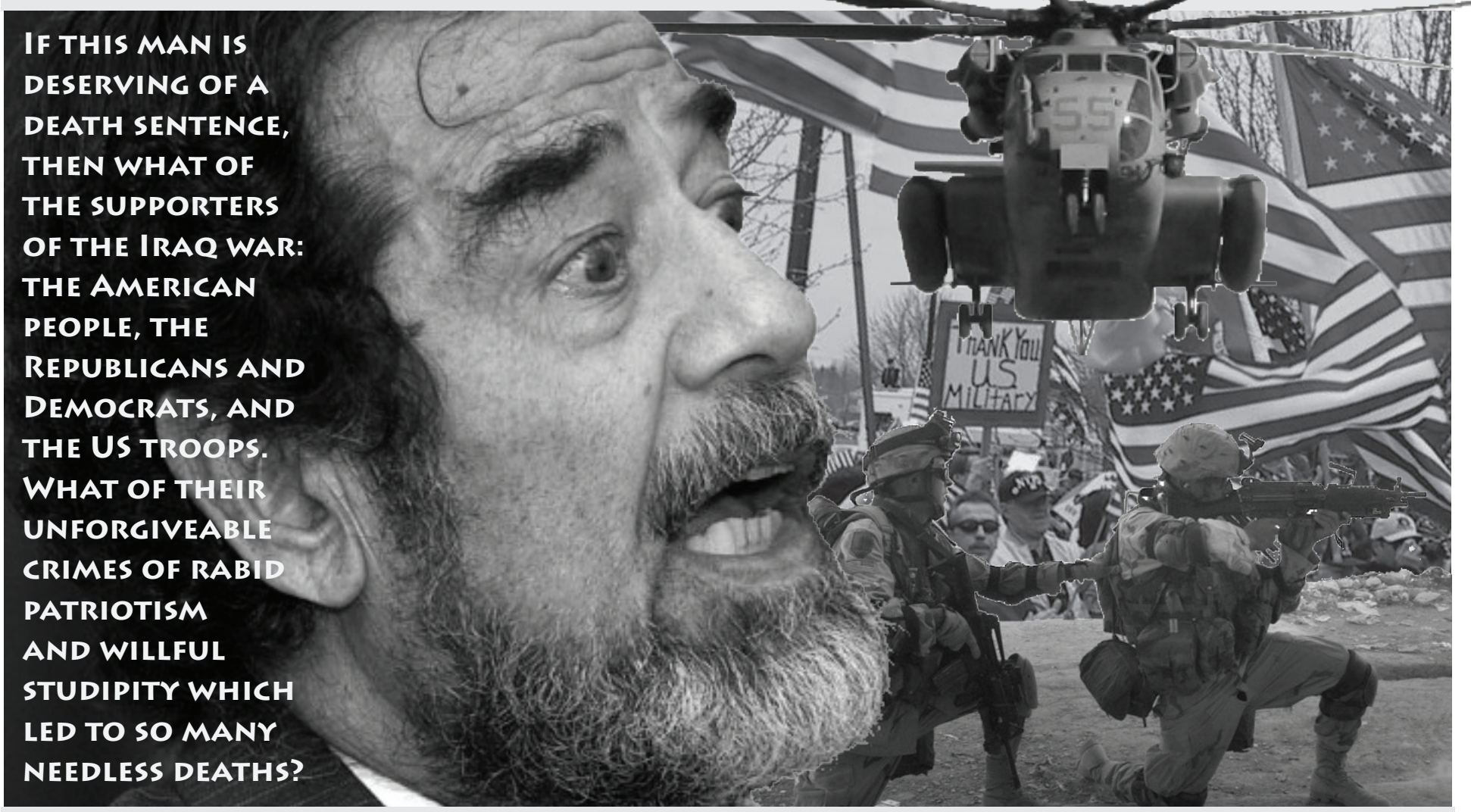
December 2006


If this man is deserving of a death sentence, then what of the supporters of the Iraq war: the American people, the Republicans and Democrats, and the US troops. What of their unforgiveable crimes of rabid patriotism and willful studipity which led to so many needless deaths?
Thank You US Military

four months before the coalition forces invaded Iraq, Saddam's government made a series of increasingly desperate offers to the US. In December, the Iraqi intelligence services approached Vincent Cannistraro, the CIA's former head of counter-terrorism, with an offer to prove that Iraq was not linked to the 9/11 attacks, and to permit several thousand US troops to enter the country to look for weapons of mass destruction. If the object was regime change, then Saddam, the agents claimed, was prepared to submit himself to internationally-monitored elections within 2 years. According to Mr Cannistraro, these proposals reached the White House, but were "turned down by the president and vice president."

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
HALADJA immediately after the battle the D.I.A. produced a classified report asserting it was Iranian gas that killed the Kurds. . .The condition of the dead Kurds indicated they had been killed with a blood agent which Iran was known to use. The Iraqis used mustard gas in the battle. Stephen C. Pelletiere, CIA's senior political analyst on Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war					**1** **2005:** Revealed NSA in 1964 "deliberately skewed" evidence on Gulf of Tonkin incident	**2** **2005:** State Dept workers say those against war are cut from official travel
3 **2005:** Senate committee approves secret agency to develop/test new drugs and vaccines	**4** **1996:** Olympia City Council decides to cut its D.A.R.E. budget by $26,800	**5** **2005:** New law in Britain permitting civil partnerships goes into effect	**6** **2005:** In a Spokane special election, Mayor Jim West (Rep) is recalled from office	**7** **2002:** Iraq hands over 12,000 pages detailing its chemical, biological and nuclear programs	**8** **2005**: Washington's statewide indoor smoking ban goes into effect	**9** **2005:** US will deny Red Cross access to a "limited #" of prisoners held in secret
10 **2002:** White House announced strategy to use pre-emptive military strike	**11** **2005:** 5,000 drunken white youths attack Arab immigrants in Sydney Australia	**12** **2005:** Federal judge dismisses legal challenges to building Mexico border fence	**13** **2005:** Analysis finds most US pollution falls on low-income people and minorities	**14** **2005:** Katrina survivors are being rejected at a high rate for low-interest government loans	**15** **1855:** Free-soil people of Kansas approve law banning African-Americans	**16** **2005:** Report reveals US wire taped own citizens w/o warrants 2005: Hamas wins
17 **1859:** GA legislature declares any African-American indicted for vagrancy can be sold	**18** **2005:** Bush states, "not only can we win the war in Iraq–we are winning the war in Iraq."	**19** 1996: Olympia City Council votes to build the proposed library on the old Yard Birds site	**20** 2005: Cheney says domestic spying okay; "the world we live in demands it."	**21** Malachi Ritscher	**22** 2000: LOTT gives $8 million to Miller to w/ draw from sewer; Miller to create more jobs	**23** **2005:** Italian court issues arrest warrants for 22 CIA operatives for Milan kidnapping
24 **2002:** Saddam says Iraqis ready to fight holy war; accuses the United States of lying	**25** **2005:** 46 Guantanamo detainees join 38 detainees already on a hunger strike	**26** **1996:** An ice storm hits South Puget Sound region leaving thousands in the dark	**27** **1999:** Seattle Police Chief Norm Stamper takes blame for WTO decisions	**28**	**29** **1998:** Iraq warns it will fire on US and British planes that fly over any part of Iraq	**30** **2005:** Five Chihuahuas attack police officer, send him to hospital w/ bites on ankle
31 **2003:** Papers reveal US plan to seize Middle East oil fields during the 1973 oil embargo						

We've destroyed Iraq . . . there was no civil war in Iraq, until we took certain steps to pit Sunnis against Shias. . . we've managed to not only destabilize Iraq, but destabilize Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iran. . .the region won't recover from this . . . for decades. And Americans are responsible .

Nir Rosen on Democracy Now!

Notice how Officer Gassett uses his 250-plus frame to manhandle an unassuming student who did nothing more than ride his bike at Critical Mass. Photo by Jon Huey.

Critical Mass bike parade met with resistance from OPD

by T. Claw

On October 27th, cyclists from Olympia and surrounding areas converged in their monthly ride to support safe, non-motorized transportation.

The Halloween Critical Mass was Olympia's largest in two years, surpassed only by the 2004 election ride. The bike parade was tainted when police harassment ended the ride with unsafe road conditions, multiple citations, and two arrests.

The Mass ride left The Evergreen State College at 4:45 p.m. with 75–80 cyclists. There was little or no dangerous/aggravated behavior by cyclists or motorists on the stretch between Evergreen and the intersection of Harrison and Division. The motorists treated the mass of cyclists with respect and a general tone of support.

Throughout the ride, one or two cyclists would stop at intersections and signal for motorists to slow down and stop, allowing the entire group to get through the intersection safely.

When past large rides had occurred, the Olympia Police Department chose to escort the rides and hold back traffic at intersections for the group's safety. Those rides were successful, nonviolent, and quite fun. At the Halloween Critical Mass, the OPD acted to the contrary.

Detour into a pigsty

As the group descended the Harrison Road hill toward downtown, the parade of cyclists picked up approximately twenty additional riders and stretched the length of three to four city blocks. The group made one circle around each roundabout, occupying them for less than one minute each, to allow for stragglers to catch up safely and stay as one unified parade as it crossed the 4th Avenue bridge.

While passing through the light at the intersection of 4th Avenue and Yashiro Street, the light turned red and a bike cop shouted not to run a red light and held his bicycle out in front of the crosswalk.

One participant who was badly injured described the incident: "They caused everyone to stop suddenly, turning a perfectly safe situation into a very dangerous one. I couldn't stop in time and hit the person in front of me. After a nasty fall I heard one of the policemen say, 'That's what you get for trying to run a red light.' They made absolutely no effort to see if I was okay or apologize for causing my accident."

On the other side of the intersection, one Critical Mass participant was being issued an $81 ticket for riding more than two abreast of the curbside. One rider noted that "police were waiting at the bottom of the hill anticipating our presence." It was later learned that the police were present not due to a commuter call (as stated by the OPD press release) but were waiting for approximately 30 minutes on the east side of the 4th Avenue bridge.

> "I think that offering citations is making the group more aggressive and the situation more dangerous overall." The officer responded, "We are just doing our job."

After the group picked up more cyclists at Heritage Park, the ride continued through downtown Olympia.

Police officers continued to pick people off and cite them for minor infractions. This aggravated the group which had been participating in a peaceful and joyful bike parade.

One cyclist was quoted while conversing with a police officer, "I think that offering citations is making the group more aggressive and the situation more dangerous overall."

The officer responded, "We are just doing our job ... who knows, there might be commuters calling in angry and they want to see us cracking down." Three police cars and three bicycle cops herded the group into a large mass, completely stopping traffic on 4th Avenue.

Officers were witnessed ordering and physically pushing cyclists into other cyclists.

While police harassment was heightening, a hissing noise was reported by people on the sidewalk. An officer was seen sprinting to the front of the mass where he assaulted a participant with a flying choke hold, sending him to the pavement.

The participant, who offered no signs of struggle, was handcuffed and dragged into a police car.

As this happened, two tires of a parked OPD cruiser hissed flat.

Participants were later informed that the officer thought he saw a shiny metal object in the hand of the participant but did not see him use it to puncture tires. A judgment call was made that this particular individual, out of many people standing near the police car, was the one who deflated the tires. Evidence was never found and there are no confirmed witnesses that saw the tires punctured. An innocent bystander who inquired about the situation was also arrested.

Bad cop, confused cop

At the police station, the arrestee says he was told by officer Gasset, "You don't have to put on a show anymore, your friends aren't here. You should cooperate. If they do show up, I'll give them a show, if you know what I mean. What's the matter can't you talk?"

Not until 2.5 hours after his arrest was he read his Miranda rights. Reportedly, Officer O'Neil told him he was being charged with 'malicious mischief in the first degree'.

"I only know what I saw," the officer said " and all I saw was a bunch of officers arresting you and suddenly you were in my car." The arrestee states that the officer later asked, "Did you slash the tires, and if you didn't, who did? And why were you standing so close?" To which the arrestee replied, "I would like to exercise my Fifth Amendment rights to not answer that question"

Cyclists' rights

As a statement of the legality of the ride, the following state laws are cited from the Revised Code of Washington (RCW 46.67.770):

1) When traveling slower than traffic, cyclists should ride as far right as is safe, except when: a) preparing to turn, b) when passing another vehicle, c) when on a multi-lane one-way road.

2) Cyclists may occupy the middle of the lane when: a) traveling at the speed of traffic, b) when the lane is too narrow to permit a car to share the lane, c) when road conditions (poor surface, drain grates, parked cars, etc.) prevent riding to the far right.

Bicycles are considered vehicles by state law and subject to the same rights and responsibilities as a motor vehicle. However, it is legal for cyclists to ride two abreast. It is also legal to parade without a permit in Thurston County.

Olympia has built an impressive infrastructure to support bicycle commuters. Many large cities such as Seattle (where thousands of citizens commute by bike every day) do not have such amenities available.

However, it is the motorists' awareness of bicycles on the road and the respect riders deserve on the road that still needs work. Day-glo clothing and night-lights can only go so far. Cyclists everywhere are harassed and routinely have their lives endangered without provocation.

The road is meant to be shared, and Critical Mass has been an effective and largely safe way to raise that awareness for 12 years. As the saying goes, "We're not blocking traffic, we are traffic."

Ride On: cyclists ride down Kaiser Road unperturbed from previous simple compliance from police. Photo by Jon Huey.

More on advocacy for the homeless

Excerpts from statement by Olympia City Councilmember T.J. Johnson on sidewalk ordinance

I intend to oppose this ordinance for two reasons. First, because I believe it is based on a faulty assumption – that our downtown is unsafe and that passing this ordinance will make it safer. Second, because passing this ordinance tonight is a divisive action when what this community clearly needs from its City Council is strong leadership that brings people together to create the kind of inclusive downtown that is welcoming to all and consistent with the vision of our comprehensive plan.

This ordinance is based on a false belief that downtown is unsafe, and that the downtown economy is in a downward spiral...Police service calls are down. Building vacancy rates continue to be within the range that national experts consider healthy in order to keep rents down and encourage the formation of new businesses. Parking is becoming more difficult, indicating that demand is growing beyond supply. Downtown Olympia continues to be a popular tourist destination as evidenced by relatively stable occupancy rates at area hotels, and only this week, a major national ranking organization announced that Olympia was the 15th safest mid-sized city in the United States.

Does this mean the downtown faces no challenges? Of course not. However, the notion that hordes of good citizens are being kept from spending their money downtown due to rampant lawlessness on our sidewalks has taken on the status of an urban legend, and like most urban legends lacks a grounding in reality.

The real challenges facing our downtown are the same as those facing all downtowns, and won't be addressed with this ordinance. In the interest of time I'll address just one of these real, rather than imaginary, challenges—competition from high volume, low cost retailers which offer acres of free parking and spend billions on advertising directed to seduce a population that increasingly defines itself by its level of consumer consumption rather than the depth of its civic engagement. For many people the choice is simple.

Why bother coming downtown to a small independent bookstore with a limited selection and higher prices when you can go to one of two national mega-bookstores in West Olympia, both of which offer huge selections, lower prices and acres of free parking (one of which was recently fast tracked for development by the City Council without adequate consideration of its impact on existing businesses). Better yet, stay at home and order your book online and avoid the hassle of ever leaving your refrigerator, home entertainment center, and your climate-controlled 2,600 square foot fortress.

I fully understand that some people feel uncomfortable in the downtown. It is always more uncomfortable to be among people who don't look like you do, act like you do, and smell like you do...And it is this same affinity for people like ourselves that is at the root of this ordinance and which will likely lead to discriminate enforcement by our police officers who are not evil, but rather human.

For people who want that experience of being exclusively among people like them, there are ample opportunities to find it—at the mall, in covenant-protected neighborhoods, frankly, in most other parts of this and every other community... The diversity of the downtown is its strength, and this ordinance diminishes, rather than enhances, that diversity.

Many people who have contacted us in support of this ordinance seem to believe that, following its passage, they will never see another teenager hanging out downtown, someone asking them for money, or someone with obvious psychological problems acting "scary." These people will be sorely disappointed by the effect of this ordinance, and I fear will soon come back asking for even "tougher" laws. Let's be clear; the type of people they object to will still be among us, only now they will be on the outside of the sidewalk, creating new user conflicts with people trying to park on the street and exit their car. We will also likely see new user conflicts as these displaced people seek refuge in Intercity Transit bus shelters, at the Olympia Center, in the library, and countless other places we have not yet even thought of.

Another thing we've heard from many supporters of the ordinance is "Thank God the City Council is finally doing something to improve the Downtown". Well, if they are regular readers of the *Olympian*, I can understand how they might have such a distorted perception about this community and the reality of what this City Council is and isn't doing....Its important for everyone to understand that this community and this Council will continue to work collaboratively on all of these far more important projects [Percival Landing renovation, new City Hall, Children's Museum, investment for housing/parking], regardless of the outcome of tonight's vote.

On the other side, opponents of the ordinance argue that the City is not doing enough to help the homeless and the mentally ill who, I believe, will be negatively impacted by this ordinance. Not by intention but by practice. And they are probably right, we should be doing more to help the less fortunate. However, I think they have overstated their case by not recognizing what we are already doing. The City of Olympia does a lot in this area, more so than any other city in this region and more so than almost any city of our size.... Of course, its not enough. It will never be enough as long as we continue to exist within a larger society where the rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer, the middle class is stressed and looking for someone to blame, and the corporate media and politicians of both major parties continue to ignore the problem.

I believe that everyone who has participated in this debate has what they consider to be the best interests of the downtown at heart. However, as we have seen, not everyone agrees on the definition of best interests. This is to be expected. But what has been most troubling about this debate has been the lack of civility. Given that [what] we are talking about has been called a "civility" ordinance I find this particularly ironic and troubling.

...Rather than working through our differences with respect, creativity and compassion – as we educate and expect our children to do – supporters and opponents alike have resorted to demonizing and stereotyping. Here are just a few of the terms that have been thrown about in the past few weeks to describe people on various sides of this issue: vermin, excrement, losers, freaks, punks, druggies, miscreants, filth, psychopaths, bums, cold-hearted, arrogant, upper-middle class snobs, elitist, greedy businessman, and my favorite "the silent majority" which has been claimed by all sides of this debate.

...In denying our basic common humanity, we seem to have started down the slippery slope that leads quickly from stereotyping to discrimination and oppression. Is this the kind of community we wish to become?

I believe that passing this ordinance tonight will only further divide our community, when what we should be doing is bringing people together to find collaborative solutions to our common problems. Even proponents of the ordinance acknowledge that whatever problem they believe exists has disappeared or at least significantly diminished with the advent of colder weather and shorter days. Why then can't we use this window of opportunity to take a step back and make another attempt at dialogue? Why not exercise our responsibility as community leaders and invite voices from all sides to sit down together and try to identify common ground? What is the worst that could happen? If the process fails, then we can say that we gave it our best shot but we could not reach agreement, at which point, I believe a higher percentage of our citizens would understand and probably support action. If, on the other hand we were actually able to come up with a shared agreement about problems and solutions, would we not then have a powerful new tool for resolving other community conflicts? It seems to me that under either scenario the community would be better off than approving this ordinance tonight.

I understand I am in the minority on this issue, and that this ordinance will probably pass. I also know that the members of this Council that support the ordinance do so not because they want to hurt any person or group, but because they believe this will help our struggling downtown. I am very proud of this Council and its commitment to our policy of "Vote and Move On." I know that the winners will not gloat and that the losers will not sulk, and we will continue to work together to make this great city even better. I only hope that the larger community that has been so divided over this issue can do the same. We have important work to do together to build an inclusive community, a great downtown and to address the genuine needs of the people that will be most impacted by this ordinance.

Forum for education on homeless

Homeless In Olympia: A Community Forum To Educate, Agitate, and Organize

The Olympia Movement for Justice and Peace will host a community forum on Homelessness in Olympia on Wednesday, **December 6, 7 to 9 pm at the Olympia Community Center, Room B.** This forum is free and open to all. Childcare will be provided, along with meals courtesy of Food Not Bombs.

The forum will include five speakers who will break through stereotypes and illuminate the struggles of the homeless in our community.

Speakers will critique Olympia's current and newly proposed ordinances that target Olympia's homeless population by criminalizing behavior specific to that population, reveal the underlying economic and social causes of homelessness, examine the unmet needs and gaps in social services here in Thurston County, and present personal experiences with homelessness.

Speakers include Pat Tassoni, Thurston County Tenants Union and Coalition for Low-Income Power; Phil Owen, Bread and Roses; Rosalinda Noriega, Partners In Prevention and Education; Peter Bohmer, Olympia Movement for Justice and Peace and Professor of Political Economy at TESC; Tim Nelson, a Homeless Activist with The Poor People's Union. The forum will be moderated by Marco Rosaire Rossi, street outreach worker and member of The Olympia Movement for Justice and Peace. Discussion with Question and Answer period will follow speaker presentations.

The Lacey example?!

by Marco Rosaire Rossi

In their Nov. 6 issue, editors of the *Olympian* proclaimed that Lacey was a "role model for its neighbors" because of the city's rapid growth in retail sales through "enticing business patrons." In particular, the editorial compared Lacey's economic growth to that of Olympia's – where retail sales dropped.

The stated reason for Lacey's increase in sales growth was its "business-friendly environment," while one of the reasons cited for Olympia's sales decline was its "crisis of public safety" in its downtown core. Before everyone else follows the lead of the *Olympian* editorial board and jumps on the "Lacey model" for economic growth, it is time to ask some important questions: Is the *Olympian*'s analysis of the situation accurate?

Specifically, is there really a public safety crisis in downtown Olympia, and is Lacey's formula for economic growth sustainable?

The public safety question

Despite all the rhetoric about the dangers of Olympia, comparatively speaking, has a very low violent crime rate.

According to FBI figures for 2004, Olympia experienced 333 violent crimes per every 100,000 persons. This is low for both state and national figures. For Washington state, the average is 461 violent crimes per every 100,000 persons, and for the nation it is 596 per every 100,000 persons. The figures become even more interesting when Olympia is compared to its neighbor Lacey for the past few years. In 2003, Olympia had a higher rate of violent crime than Lacey. (Olympia was at 3.3% while Lacey was at 2.8%). But a shift occurred in the following years. Olympia had 145 acts of violent crime in 2003, and by 2005 that figure had dropped to 115 violent crimes. Conversely, Lacey's violent crime rate jumped in 2004 (to 3.3%), and in 2005 remained higher than Olympia's. Olympia had 258 violent crimes per every 100,000 persons while Lacey had 272 violent crimes per every 100,000 persons.

This evidence makes clear that the so-called "public safety crisis" is unfounded. The myth persists and is seriously debated only because of an intense class-bias against the poor and homeless. People with this bias automatically assume that if the homeless or street vagabonds are hanging out together then they must be "up to no good," or if a person is engaging in anti-social behavior downtown, that person must be homeless.

The economic question

The editorial in the *Olympian* attributes Lacey's recent economic success to its ability to attract major corporate enterprises such as Home Depot and Costco with its "business-friendly environment." Lacey is a very young city – especially compared to Olympia. It has only been incorporated since 1966, which means that Olympia and Lacey have two very different economic infrastructures. Lacey is very under-developed compared to Olympia. Rapid economic growth through corporate enterprises is possible in underdeveloped areas because you are starting from nothing.

Olympia, on the other hand, has built itself off of industries and businesses that have survived for decades. Allowing major corporate enterprises to move in could seriously disrupt these foundations – which, for Olympia, would be locally owned businesses that are mostly located in the downtown core.

There is also the issue of how large corporate enterprises tend to depress the economies they enter over time. An essential part of any development plan is the ability to build off of previous gains.

This is difficult to do in a corporate-friendly atmosphere. Dollars spent at Home Depot and Costco vanish from circulation in the local economy. The ability of corporations to undercut prices and offer more services ends up destroying small independent businesses. The low pay and

▸ **Lacey** continued on page 8

Weapons of Mass Determination

AMID SILENCE FROM THE US PRESS, AN OLYMPIAN REPORTS ON THE PEOPLE'S STRUGGLE IN OAXACA

Story and photos by Rochelle Gause

Running as fast as I can, surrounded by hundreds of others, I can hear screams behind me. Glancing back, through the darkness of night, I can only differentiate between the masses running with me and the federal police by the light reflecting off their shields and face masks. They are still advancing.

A hand pushes my left shoulder and I realize there are medics behind me trying to run from the police while carrying a man on a stretcher clasping a bloody cloth to his head. The medics are trying to reach the makeshift clinic that the movement set up in a building just a short distance ahead.

I continue to run block after block as more people pour in from side streets. The police are obviously advancing on multiple streets simultaneously. Panic is starting to set in.

A demonstrator calls for Ulises' ouster during the Nov. 19 Women's March.

Rushing through my mind are the stories I have listened to over and over in the past two weeks while interviewing those who have suffered human rights violations at the hands of the federal police—the stories of sexual assault, of beatings, of psychological torture, of death threats.

A few men duck into an alley. I follow, unsure if I am escaping the danger or running directly into it. A woman and her daughter, who recognize me from the internet cafe, motion us into their home. Inside, I lean against the wall and slide to the floor. Immediately I think of those who were unable to find a place to hide, of those who could not run. People of all ages had been in the streets all day. I hear gunshots.

Seventh mega-march turned into confrontation

Saturday, November 25, had begun with the seventh "mega-march." Thousands had marched from the outskirts of Santa María Coyotepec to the Oaxaca City center. It was yet another incredible show of support for the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO). The march was calling for the removal of both the corrupt governor of Oaxaca, Ulises Ruiz Ortiz, and the Federal Preventative Police (PFP), who have been in Oaxaca for almost a month now. The demonstrators were a highly diverse group—including people of all ages—from various indigenous groups, unions, and rural villages. People gathered along the streets applauding as the march passed. Many handed out tangerines, water, and sandwiches to the crowd.

When they arrived in the city, the plan was to encircle the center square for 48 hours. This is the square where striking teachers from all over the state of Oaxaca created an encampment that led to the beginning of the movement over six months ago. The federal police have occupied it since they entered Oaxaca on October 29. As the people began the circle, the police, in full riot gear, refined their formation at each of the entrances backed by a police officer armed with live ammunition on top of an armoured vehicle.

Although APPO had made it clear that the plan was to remain completely nonviolent, within half an hour street battles broke out between the movement and the police in at least two of the entrances. Some members of the movement, armed with rocks, Molotov cocktails, and fireworks, faced off with the police, who used an incredible amount of tear gas, rocks and marbles shot with slingshots. Also, according to LIMEDDH, the Mexican League in Defense of Human Rights, state government backed paramilitaries were seen on the roofs of buildings helping to provoke the confrontations. Earlier in the day the radio station of Ulises' political party (PRI) had called for people to dump boiling water and acid on the demonstrators.

Federal police advance

After a while the police pushed the people north up the hill, at one point taking over the Santo Domingo plaza, where the movement has been centered since the police forced them out of the main square. The police continued to fire tear gas into the crowd and burned the tarps and other belongings of the movement and vendors in the Santo Domingo plaza. The report from APPO's most recent Constitutive Congress were scattered all over the ground. During this time plainclothes police were detaining people in the streets. After the police retreated back to the main square, many movement members regrouped in Santo Domingo as night was falling.

Nov. 19 Women's March. Leila, a member of the APPO women's coordination committee, explains the objects carried by the women: "The pots and pans reflect that in Oaxacan homes, there is no food. In a country where there is no justice, no equality, where there is no respect for human rights, these pans are not only empty of food but also of these basic principles."

Suddenly the police advanced over eight blocks, forcing the crowd to continue running north of the main square. Paramilitary groups also arrived on the scene, shooting into the crowd as people ran for their lives. Movement members attempted to set up barricades; I witnessed many women scrambling to gather rocks for defense, breaking stones off of the fancy plazas where Ulises has squandered the state's money. Cars and government buildings were set on fire.

Throughout the next few hours federal police and plainclothes gunmen continued to attack members of the movement who had taken cover in various locations. Three movement members were killed, 39 disappeared, 149 detained, and over 140 injured (twenty with live ammunition), not including the hundred people the medics assisted who were overwhelmed by the gas and pepper spray. And this is just on November 25.

The people of Oaxaca who are facing this fate are guilty of the crime of demanding justice and trying to organize a democratic alternative to the corrupt and repressive leadership that governs their state.

The Mexican federal government's response, supposedly to restore order, has instead attempted to maintain the exploitive status quo through further repression and with no regard for the true root causes of this conflict—the extreme poverty and unjust government policies that benefit a few at the cost of the majority.

According to Yésica Sánchez, president of LIMEDDH, "It is clear that the PFP are not interested in instilling peace. What they come to do is intimidate and try to criminalize the social movement in Oaxaca."

If the federal police had come to Oaxaca with the true intention of restoring order, those who have committed the violence would be brought to justice. Instead, the murderers of the fifteen people killed for their involvement in the movement still walk the streets, now with added protection and assistance of the PFP.

Delegates from Chiapas traveled to Oaxaca to show solidarity. The delegates included survivors of the 1997 Acteal massacre.

Ulises claims victory

On the morning after the mass repression, standing in the very spot where hundreds had run for their lives less than eighteen hours before, Governor Ulises claimed victory. It had been months since he had been able to show his face in the city.

As helicopters flew overhead, Governor Ulises, surrounded by plainclothes police, explained that Oaxaca now belongs to the true Oaxaqueños. "We who love Oaxaca, its history and its traditions feel profoundly offended and attacked by the vandals' actions on Saturday. Those responsible are being arrested and should be held accountable for their actions in the face of justice. Today with the help of the PFP and the state forces we have recuperated the heart of Oaxaca for the Oaxaqueños and for all Mexicans."

For hours prior to this press spectacle, workers cleaned up the remains of the police repression. They picked up the tear gas canisters; the graffiti and stencils were painted over. A large water truck had sprayed away the dried blood and burnt remains of the movement from the square.

Since November 25, the federal police have surrounded the Santo Domingo plaza and most large parks in the city; they are routinely patrolling the streets of Oaxaca.

Reports of people being picked up off the streets by armed gunmen are being called in to Radio Universidad regularly. The station has once again called for support in fear that the police will manage to ignore

Left: Sixth mega-march, Nov. 5. A woman shows the face of one of many movement members who have recently been disappeared by the police or by PRI supporters. ***Center:*** Nov. 19 Women's March. Participants hold hands in a line to prevent people (including infiltrators) from provoking the federal police—not that the federal police require an excuse. As the march approached the first line of police, marchers chanted loudly. The police met these chants with pepper spray. ***Right:*** Nov. 19 Women's March. Many women carried mirrors with labels such as "I am a rapist," "Murderer," "Repressor," which they held up to the federal police. At least one rape has been reported during their time in Oaxaca.

the autonomous nature of the university and destroy the station, the primary means of communication remaining for the movement. The PRI radio station has called for the burning of EDUCA, a well-respected social organization that operates throughout the state. Over 100 of the movement members detained by the police have been transported out of Oaxaca to federal prison.

Those in power continue to try to suppress this movement with intimidation, violence, and murder, because change is in motion. According to Cesar Chavez, "once social change begins, it cannot be reversed. You cannot uneducate the person who has learned to read. You cannot humiliate the person who feels pride. You cannot oppress the people who are not afraid anymore. We have seen the future, and the future is ours."

On November 10–12, the movement held a Constitutive Congress where they elected 220 representatives from all seven regions, formalizing the popular governance structure of APPO. Three thousand people attended the forum further defining their program of struggle and creating a true bottom up alternative to the corrupt political parties that run the state.

I still fear for the people, for how much suffering they will have to face. On November 20, there was an incredible number of actions worldwide in solidarity with the people of Oaxaca, but there needs to be an even larger outcry.

Please consider getting involved in solidarity actions. This is not simply to support the efforts of the people of Oaxaca to achieve self-determination and social justice. They are providing a model for the rest of Mexico to also stand up in the face of poverty, estimated at over fifty percent of the population, of losing their land and resources to foreign corporations, of having to flee to the US illegally to be able to provide for their families.

On the national level, Andrés Manuel López Obrador held his own swearing-in ceremony on November 20 as the "legitimate president" of Mexico in front of hundreds of thousands of supporters. Two days prior, he told his supporters, "Those neofascist reactionaries better not think they'll have room to maneuver; we're going to keep them on a short leash."

Massive civil disobedience is planned for December 1, the date of the inauguration ceremony for Felipe Calderón, who "won" the presidential election by less than one percentage point with clear evidence of fraud.

The trend of electing leftist leadership continues in Latin America, confronting the injustice of neoliberal policies and beginning to unravel the exploitive policies that have left the majority of their population in immense poverty. At the same time, President Bush has quietly dropped the ban on training the militaries of Latin America.

As our country readies itself to carry on our legacy of genocide to prevent the much needed changes the people are demanding, we must become active. Not only for the people of Oaxaca, Mexico, or Latin America, but for the global struggle that is taking root.

Rochelle Gause is an Olympia activist who has been in Oaxaca since the uprising began in June, and has served as a delegate with the Olympia–Rafah Sister City Project.

UPDATE

On Nov. 30, just hours before going to press, Works in Progress *received a message from Rochelle that she was leaving Oaxaca, due to the increasing police crackdown on foreigners. Rochelle wrote, "It is hard to leave right now. The movement decided to have a big march tomorrow anyway [despite intesified repression]. I really fear for their lives, but there is no question we [internationals] would get picked up if we were there. The police are driving through the streets regularly now—police state. The radio station of the movement is gone. The last barricade destroyed. Over 250 people detained in the last 72 hours…"*

Oaxacan activists and Chiapas delegates raise a peace flag together.

The **Popular Assembly the People of Oaxaca** (APPO) is a nonviolent movement engaged in **civil disobedience** in response to **widespread corruption, electoral fraud, and brutal repression**. Please take a few moments to express your solidarity and support by demanding that the civil and human rights of all involved be respected. **Send faxes, make phone calls, and send e-mails** to the officials below expressing your concern for the safety for those involved in the peaceful protest, urging non-violent methods and sincere dialogue to resolve the conflict. We also urge you to **call your senators and congressional representatives**, expressing your concern for the human rights of people in Oaxaca's popular movement, and asking them to demand that the government not use force in their attempt to resolve the conflict.

Thank you for your help.

Please write to President Vicente Fox and Interior Secretary Carlos Ababscal, and tell them to respect the people of Oaxaca and to dismiss Gov. Ulises Ruiz Ortiz right away. Their e-mail addresses are:

vicente.fox.quesada@presidencia.gob.mx
cabascal@segob.gob.mx

Also, send appeals to Carlos de Icaza, Mexican Ambassador to the US:

(202) 728-1600
Fax: (202) 728-1698
mexembusa@sre.gob.mx
1911 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20006

Sixth mega-march, Nov. 5. More people have been covering their faces amid the increasing number of arrests and disappearances caused by the federal police.

▸ **Lacey** continued from page 5

lack of job security for people who work at these businesses stagnates the economy because they only make enough money to cover their basic necessities. In the end, this corporate-friendly environment is not sustainable; it leads to economic growth, but not necessarily to economic development.

Perhaps the biggest and most important loss in this corporate-friendly environment is that of civic virtue. The reorganizing of city life—with the elimination of public spaces, the arts, and recreation (essentially transforming the city into one big mall)—also changes its people.

Soon, people start identifying more as consumers, managers, and workers than as citizens. Civic participation and social life end up taking a back seat to corporate-controlled markets. People become more concerned with shopping than they are with voting or more meaningful levels of civic engagement.

Ironically, this atmosphere of isolation and rampant materialism becomes a breeding ground for the very anti-social behavior which the editors of the *Olympian* claim is preventing people from shopping in downtown Olympia.

Creating our own example

The editors were right that Lacey's neighbors do have a lot to learn from the city, but the lesson is in what not to do. This of course does not mean to say that Olympia is "good" and Lacey is "bad." Both cities have their problems and both have residents who are working to create more livable and democratic communities.

If either city is to move forward in a manner that supports all its citizens, they must craft policies with a focus on social and economic justice. If not, then "lost sales" will be the least of either city's hardships in the perhaps not-so-distant future.

Marco Rosaire Rossi is a street outreach worker and member of The Olympia Movement for Justice and Peace.

Homeless Outreach: Supplies needed

For many of us, winter is a time of fellowship. It's a time to recognize major holidays, remember family, celebrate the new year and start new beginnings. However for others, winter can be a time of hardship and isolation. Each Winter, Olympia's homeless and street populations struggle to meet their basic needs for food, sobriety, warmth, and community. For some, getting through winter is literally a matter of life or death.

The **Emma Goldman Youth and Homeless Outreach Project** (EGYHOP), a Project of Done & Done, has dedicated itself to relieving these burdens on Olympia's most downtrodden by providing direct resources to populations in need. We serve all types of people, and are sometimes the only option left for those who have been denied access to other services based on mental health issues, addictions, or criminality.

Please help us fight poverty this winter by giving generously to the Emma Goldman Youth and Homeless Outreach Project. We always appreciate monetary donations, but our true value is in what we can immediately offer to others. **Blankets, sleeping bags, backpacks, camping gear, gloves, tarps, hygiene supplies** and **warm clothing—especially socks**, are the most important contributions.

Donations can be dropped off at the Bike & Bike space on Fourth Avenue and Franklin Street in Olympia. A donation bin is located at the Franklin Street side door of the new Dumpster Values building. Monetary donations can be made by sending a check to "Done and Done," PO Box 6382, Olympia, WA 98507-6382. Call (360) 570-0608 for more information. egyhop is a project of the Done and Done 501(c)3 non-profit. Non-profit id #20-3433042

Of War and Politics:

Closing the gap between the veteran and peace communities

by Jeff Berryhill

A disturbing, yet illustrative article appeared in the *New York Times* on Nov. 10 entitled "The Struggle for Iraq; Marines Get the News from an Iraqi Host: Rumsfeld's Out. 'Who's Rumsfeld?'".

The article reveals that soldiers currently serving in Iraq failed to recognize the name Donald Rumsfeld. Published two days following the resignation of the embattled defense secretary, this demonstrates a sad reality all too familiar in my encounters with members of the armed forces. Aside from the knowledge of their immediate commanders, soldiers were generally unaware or unconcerned about their civilian and military leadership or the politics of war. This is especially troubling considering the decisions enacted by Rumsfeld and his associates with the consequences they entailed.

For a number of reasons, both frustrating and tragic, soldiers consider themselves either disinterested or unaware of the political climate in the domestic or international arena. I recently attended a forum at St. Martin's College in Lacey where returning soldiers and witnesses to warfare shared elements and perspectives from what they witnessed. A recurring theme for the panelists who served in Iraq was how they considered themselves fairly apolitical, yet steadfastly in favor of the current war effort and occupation.

This pro-war position can certainly be perceived as political in nature, just as much as the fact that joining the United States military has a number of accompanying political ramifications. Yet, service for GIs is understood as a simple matter of duty; duty to our country, its citizens, its ideals, and most importantly to the fellow soldiers they go to battle with. Accordingly, partisanship and the various other ways political discourse is represented in this country appear very distant or insignificant to the soldier attempting to earn a living and, at the same time, preserve their own life.

> He indicated that if he were to see that his efforts had been made in vain..., his service (which he viewed as humanitarian and liberating in nature) would be tainted.

Coming to terms

Following the conclusion of the panel, I approached one of the panelists, a young man discharged after being injured in Iraq, for further questions. What he revealed was both heartrending and illuminating. I asked why he felt he was not very political. He responded by saying that in light of his sacrifice and the sacrifice of a number of his friends and peers, some losing their life in combat, he did not want to explore the motives or circumstances surrounding the decision to invade. He indicated that if he were to see that his efforts had been made in vain or had been conducted with less than altruistic intentions, his service (which he viewed as humanitarian and liberating in nature) would be tainted.

Recently, a friend of mine who served in the Marine Corps returned from a tour of duty in Iraq. At one point during his service, prior to his mission in Iraq, this friend of mine berated me for not supporting the President during the 2004 election cycle while identifying himself as politically disinterested. After his return, the friend was singing a completely different tune: remarking about his frustrating experience in Iraq and his perception that the occupation served no effective purpose. In fact, he said he hoped we're involved in that region to secure access to oil or else we would have no other reason to continue any further. This type of cynical and frustrated response to the experience is commonplace in my interactions with members of the service after their return. A different panelist from the St. Martin's event expressed considerable disdain at the penny-pinching practices of the federal government, with regards to supplying soldiers with deficient equipment and low salaries.

Among his friends

The insight and perspective veterans provide from the unique narrative they possess is invaluable in understanding the politics of war, making effective interaction critical for those involved in peace and justice movements. I come from a town where we've had five young men within a year or two of my age (22) serve one or more tours of duty in Iraq. From my graduating class, I have had about half a dozen or so friends join some branch of the armed forces. Due to these friendships, I have considerable contacts with soldiers which have provided me with insight on how to communicate with them in a very non-confrontational or informal yet often inquisitive manner. From my experience, I have found it is important to be sensitive and respectful of their decisions, perhaps asking questions or conveying opinions in a subtle and non-confrontational fashion.

> Repairing our relationship with soldiers is an important step we should take towards actualizing our goals of eliminating war and ensuring justice.

The *New York Times* article I referred to earlier also indicated that most veterans become more politically active later in their lives. Due to this reality, it is important to forge strong and meaningful relationships with GIs as many are dealing with post-traumatic stress disorder. A combat Vietnam veteran friend of mine told me how understanding the manipulation of patriotism and the immorality of such wars as Vietnam and Iraq can actually help veterans begin to heal their own emotional wounds. It can actually be therapeutic for veterans who become actively involved in ending the type of wars they once participated in by diverting PTSD-related self-destructive behavior into constructive anti-war involvement.

While many of us would like to see the type of heroic stance exhibited by Iraq war resister Lt. Ehren Watada increase in numbers, this act of Herculean courage is relatively rare. What may be more likely is the hope that those returning from Iraq and Afghanistan would recognize the systemic problems with these invasions and be open to joining a peace and justice veterans group (like Veterans for Peace or Iraq Veterans Against the War) to vocalize their critiques or concerns about the armed services.

Crossing the gap

Veterans speak with tremendous authority on matters of war and peace and we must recognize this reality. They provide a wealth of information and insight on the nature of conflict, revealing a perspective only a first-hand account can provide. Therefore, our contacts with veterans should be done in a manner that could facilitate the internalized criticisms or reservations of how war is conducted to come to the surface, rather than alienating the soldier. Often our contacts with veterans are both ill-advised and combative, failing to move beyond our own reservations about war and failing to humanize the exchange. Many veterans and current members of the service are frustrated by the condescension and ridicule they perceive from the 'enlightened' peace community and often immediately disregard our efforts.

Goals to set

Repairing our relationship with soldiers is an important step we should take towards actualizing our goals of eliminating war and ensuring justice. Constructive communication with combat veterans is a responsibility for all members of the peace and justice community precisely because it has the extraordinary potential to play an integral component in creating a more equitable and just society we so vigorously labor to build.

Jeff Berryhill is a Senior at The Evergreen the State College studying political economy. He is currently involved with the local group South Sound Project for Military Resistance and Justice, and has worked on projects in solidarity with war resisters Lt. Ehren Watada and Spc. Suzanne Swift.

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The Case of Spc. Suzanne Swift:

A Gendered Approach to Organizing Against Rape in the Military

by Caitlin Esworthy

In January of 2005, the date of her redeployment to Iraq, Military Police Specialist Suzanne Swift went Absent Without Leave (AWOL). She had endured (in addition to the 'normal' traumas of service) sexual harassment in Kuwait at the hands of her platoon sergeant and subsequent command rape, public humiliation and harassment by her squad leader in Iraq.

The medical consequences of her experience have been grave. She was diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder related to sexual abuse by a personal therapist in Oregon, but the military's health professionals did not confirm the diagnosis in its entirety. She is currently working at Fort Lewis but remains in a delicate situation. After being reassigned (thankfully away from her assailant) she is still dealing with the backlash of going public with her accusations. Due to the stigma attached to victims of sexual assault and the publicity of her case, those around her at times don't speak with Swift for fear of being accused of sexual harassment. In September, after withholding the results of their investigation for over two months, the army formally charged Suzanne with "missing movement" and Absence Without Leave.

With public support for the war in Iraq waning on a massive level, Suzanne Swift's continually unfolding case has received significant attention from the press. Sexual assault and rape within the armed forces add further dimensions to the already violent history of the US occupation. Swift's refusal to deploy and her bravery in making her case public has inspired anti-war activists and other victims of sexual violence in the armed services across the country. Her stand has provided a face for the statistics of rape in the military and brought forth into the consciousness of many the reality of women service members.

Suzanne's case brings attention to one of the realities of war that is often not discussed: rape. Rape, sexual violence, and the eroticization of violence have long been a part of how war is executed. By speaking out against sexual violence, Suzanne is speaking out against one of the tenets of war and therefore working to expose and dismantle war itself.

Although we hear very little about sexual assault and abuse in the military, it is tragically a common occurrence. A 2003 Denver Post article stated that, "Nearly one-third of the women in the military have reported a rape or attempted rape, compared with 18 percent in the civilian world. Yet during the past decade, twice as many accused sex offenders in the Army were given administrative punishments as were court-martialed."

The lack of effective prosecution for sex offenders is connected with systemic problems for women regarding bureaucratic procedures, confidentiality, and access to systems of justice within the military. In society at large, we are all victims of 'a culture of silence' surrounding sexual assault, but the armed forces also suffer from a heightened 'culture of violence.' "Sexual assault is the most underreported violent crime in America, and that's going to be true in the military as well," according to Pentagon spokesman Roger Kaplan. Silence isn't the only factor in the systemic deficiencies in justice for sexual assault victims; recruiters often turn a blind eye to warning signs.

Commanding and superior officers often reinforce the prevalence of sexual assault. According to a study conducted by University of Iowa researchers and Iowa City Veterans Affairs Medical Center (VAMC) "Our findings suggest that if sexual harassment is allowed in the workplace, women in those environments have a significantly increased risk of being raped." The results were consistent in all areas of service to be about a four-fold risk of rape for women whose superiors made sexually demeaning comments or allowed such behavior.

> Organizing for war resisters like Suzanne involves working toward a greater understanding of how gender politics play into the daily lives of women in the military and, more important to the role of a supporter, how sexism functions within the anti-war movement.

Suzanne was a victim of both sexual harassment and command rape. In an interview Suzanne details that sexual remarks are simply a part of military life. She makes it clear that difference in rank changes the situation, especially in a combat zone where your assailant is making life and death decisions. "The other soldiers don't have power over you," she said.

As an institution, the military is integrally reliant on a violent construction of masculinity. This begs the question: where do women fit into the social relations and power structures within the military? The military is dependent on exploiting and promoting violent sexuality and sex as conquest. From the "shock and awe" bombing of Baghdad to the fact that the U.S. Air Force now "...admits showing films of violent pornography to pilots before they fly bombing raids." It is contradictory to have this type of violent sexuality prevalent and expect rape to not play a significant role, especially in the lives of women in the armed forces.

The organizing and campaigning around Suzanne's case has fluctuated in intensity, but has been marked by a few minor debates in the region which highlight some key issues that need to be recognized.

Some conflicts were brought up surrounding the creation of 'Camp Suzanne' situated outside of Fort Lewis, an attempt to replicate Camp Casey in Crawford, Texas—a campaign that was one of the more prominent actions by the peace movement during the Iraq war. Preparation, outreach, and dialogue were lacking prior to the beginning of Camp Suzanne. Other activists cited conflicting times with another campaign, lack of pragmatic support due to short notice, and unwillingness to delay other issues during the campaign. Conceptually, the idea received a great deal of support by the larger peace movement as well as Suzanne, Sara Rich (Suzanne's mother), Cindy Sheehan, and was endorsed by Ani DiFranco and groups such as Veterans For Peace (local and national).

However well-intentioned, the language initially used by organizers belied a naiveté at the systemic nature of sexism and strong-armed approach that doesn't always work when you are dealing with issues of sexual violence.

Another question brought up around Suzanne's case and organizing support was whether or not she qualified as a war resister.

Because her legal case was based on military justice and she did not go AWOL as a statement against the war or to achieve Conscientious Objector status, some do not consider Swift to technically be a war resister. This point, although accurate at a certain level, neglects the important fact that her message has become increasingly more anti-war and more radical as her trauma is extended by her continued service and lack of justice on her case. It is important to be mindful of what was clearly a hierarchy of needs for Suzanne. Knowing that she would be placed back under the command of the same officer that had abused her, an anti-war message was probably not seen in her mind as the most effective strategy. It also important to be mindful of the discrepancy between what one might imagine a war resister to look like and the reality of the armed forces today.

Camp Suzanne was gaining noticeable support by the end from motorists once commuters entering and leaving the base became familiar with the message. Solidarity with women living on base is important in building a broad-based movement. Organizing for war resisters like Suzanne involves working toward a greater understanding of how gender politics play into the daily lives of women in the military and, more important to the role of a supporter, how sexism functions within the anti-war movement.

There are a number of areas that civilians can pressure the military to improve upon. According to the report "Sexual Assault in the Military: Context Factors and Measurements Issues," sexual assault can be significantly reduced if women are recruited and promoted into positions of leadership, gender-balanced work environments are created, and organizational climates are created where complaints of sexual harassment and assault are taken seriously, responded to swiftly.

Fort Lewis should seriously take into account these studies and respond to Suzanne's case judiciously if they are genuinely interested in reducing sexual violence. A recommendation to create an environment that is intolerant of sexual violence could include the introduction of more thorough and frequent sexual assault prevention trainings (in addition to the twice-a-year classes cited by Sgt. 1st Class James Currier, a spokesman for the Equal Opportunity Program at Fort Lewis) and mandatory anti-oppression workshops for all soldiers, with a more focused and detailed program for officers.

Playing a preventive role in the approach toward rape and sexual assault in the military is crucial in the struggle against a culture of violence. There is ample evidence to suggest reforms will have a significant impact on the daily lives of women serving in the military and it is the role of civilian citizens to be allies of rape and abuse victims in a manner that fulfills the needs of those resisting and with the requisite sensitivity due. This is not to say that reform of the system erases the violent culture that is being struggled against but it could mean all the difference to the life of a woman serving in the armed forces.

Caitlin Esworthy is a student at TESC and works with Olympia Movement for Justice and Peace.

From "Kramer" to the NYPD: Racism kills us

by Molly Secours

Last week comedian Michael Richards fired a round of angry racial epithets at several young black men heckling him in a comedy club in Los Angeles. One week later, Sean Bell, a 23 year old groom-to-be and his two friends (all black) were gunned down by five plain-clothed New York City police officers who felt compelled to fire over fifty shots total at the three unarmed men who were celebrating Bell's impending marriage.

Although some have characterized the slaughter as "mistaken identity," the three were unmistakably young, black and deemed menacing --even without possessing weapons. Apparently these young men didn't need to be armed to be considered dangerous.

When replaying the video of Richards' relentless round of expletives aimed at pranksters in the audience, one cannot help but draw parallels to one of the police officers emptying two full magazines at three unarmed black men. He too must have felt very threatened.

It appears racism has no coastal bias and the indignation and public outcry that erupted on the heels of Richards' "slip of the tongue" was deafening and certainly warranted. And yet, after all the criticism and numerous video replays plastered on network television, Richards, in an interview with talk show host David Letterman, earnestly insists "I'm not racist," as if this is the only question of concern.

Pundits, entertainers, activists and journalists spend hours posing the question "Is he racist?" and carefully pointing their forefinger in the direction of the culprit, speculation abounds as to whether or not Richard's career is over.

Why? Because in America we don't tolerate overt racism. No Siree, no "N" words here. Never mind that our prisons are disproportionately filled with black men and women, that schools serving predominately black and brown communities remain understaffed and underfunded and that in study after study, it is revealed that people of color receive inferior health care, employment opportunities and many are destined to live in poverty their entire lives.

So just what did we learn from the past week's debacles? We learned that after a white, wealthy, quick witted and beloved comedian felt threatened by several young black hecklers, he reached in his comedic tool bag and pulled the pin out of a racially charged verbal grenade and hurled it into the balcony.

Richards' apologetic protestations on Letterman are indicative of the mass denial infecting this entire country, especially white America. We shake our heads in consternation as if what lies in Richards does not live inside all of us. As if somehow, the problem is "over there" and thank god it does not live in me. If that were true, Sean Bell (and thousands like him) would most likely be enjoying his honeymoon rather than lying buried six feet under.

After viewing the Richards video several times, it appeared the vitriol was lurking just under the surface, which of course it was.

Just under the surface in the ways we instinctively clutch our purses on the street when approached by a black man, when we are alone on an elevator or when we read the latest headline about what is commonly known as "black-on-black crime."

If only we were less concerned with being labeled "a racist" and more concerned about the systemic and institutional damage inflicted on people of color on a daily basis. Maybe then we could transform our outrage and indignation of overt bigotry and violence into something meaningful.

When will we understand that these outbursts, like the one Richards displayed last week, are symptomatic rather than atypical of something much deeper? That the words he vomited at his audience are very much connected to the fatal fifty shots fired at Sean Bell and his friends.

If only we could start from the premise that yes, of course Michael Richards is racist, and so are most white people. It is impossible to be raised in a society where white supremacy is one of the founding principles and not entertain racist notions. It's too deeply ingrained for any of us to boast of immunity. Simply impossible.

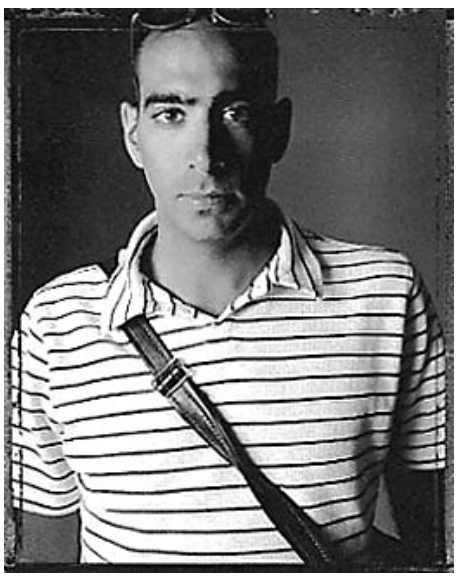
If we could somehow grasp the notion that it is only to the degree that we acknowledge and unearth the racist notions that lie hidden in all of us, often just beneath the surface, that we will become "less racist."

If so, perhaps we might one day be capable of making the correlation between words that wound and bullets that kill.

Molly Secours is a writer/filmmaker/speaker and frequent co-host on"Behind The Headlines" and "FreeStyle on 88.1 WFSK in Nashville. She can be reached through her website: www.mollysecours.com .

No choice but to live together

by Ali Abunimah



As I watched the images last week of destruction from the Gaza Strip, where an Israeli shelling attack had killed an entire family, as a Palestinian I could understand the feelings of one survivor who said, "I cannot see a day when we will live in peace with them." But I also know there is no other choice.

When Israel was established, its founders said it would be an exemplary, moral state. For many Jews, it seemed like a miraculous redemption after so much suffering and loss in the Nazi Holocaust.

Palestinians experienced a different reality. Israel became a "Jewish state" in a country that had always been multicultural and multireligious. The expulsion and exclusion of Palestinians from their own homeland has led Israelis and Palestinians into an endless nightmare of mutual non-recognition and bloodshed.

For decades, the conventional wisdom has been that this conflict can only be resolved by partitioning the country into two states. Yet despite enormous political and diplomatic efforts to achieve this, the two peoples remain thoroughly if unhappily intertwined. Israel's project of establishing settler-colonies inside the territories where Palestinians wanted to create a state has rendered separation impossible.

At the same time, Israel finds itself in a conundrum. For the first time since the state was founded, Israeli Jews no longer form an absolute majority in the territory they control. Today there are roughly 5 million Jews and 5 million Palestinians living in the same land. The trends are incontestable. Within a few years, Palestinians will form the clear majority.

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert recognized in 2003 what this would mean: "We are approaching the point where more and more Palestinians will say, 'There is no place for two states,'" in this country, and "'All we want is the right to vote.' The day they get it, we will lose everything." Warning that Israel could not remain both a Jewish state and a democracy if it held on to all of the occupied Palestinian territories, Olmert added, "I shudder to think that liberal Jewish organizations that shouldered the burden of struggle against apartheid, will lead the struggle against us."

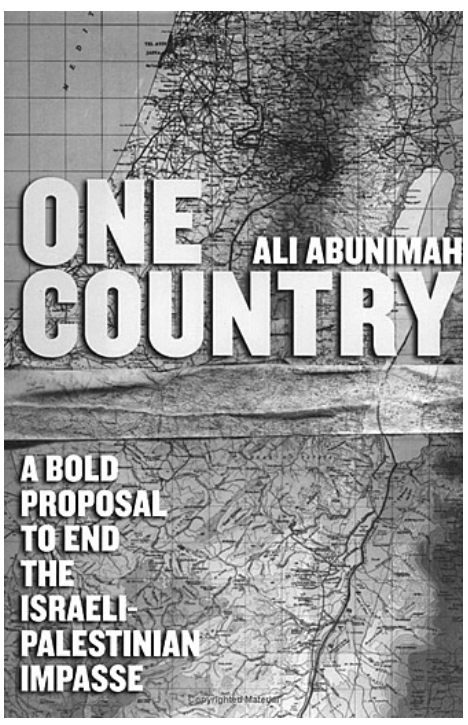
Some Israeli extremists, like the new Deputy Prime Minister Avigdor Lieberman, believe this "demographic problem" can be solved by expelling non-Jews. Israel's chosen solution, which it calls "unilateral separation," walls Palestinians into impoverished ghettos Palestinians compare to the townships and Bantustans set up for blacks by the apartheid government of South Africa. The result of this approach, as we see in Gaza, is more hopelessness, resistance and defiance, and sure disaster for both peoples.

The two-state solution remains attractive and comforting in its apparent simplicity and finality. But in reality, it has proved unattainable because neither Palestinians nor Israelis are willing to give up enough of the country that they love. Faced with this impasse, a small but growing group of Israelis and Palestinians are tentatively exploring an old idea long dormant: Why not have a single state in which both peoples enjoy equal rights and protections and religious freedom? Many people dismiss this as utopian dreaming.

> If the prospect of "one secular country shared by all" seems "unthinkable" in Palestine–Israel today, then it is possible to appreciate how unlikely such a solution once seemed in South Africa.

Allister Sparks, the legendary editor of the anti-apartheid *Rand Daily Mail* newspaper, observed that the conflict in South Africa most resembled those in Northern Ireland and Palestine–Israel, because each involved "two ethno-nationalisms" in a seemingly irreconcilable rivalry for the "same piece of territory." If the prospect of "one secular country shared by all" seems "unthinkable" in Palestine–Israel today, then it is possible to appreciate how unlikely such a solution once seemed in South Africa. But "that is what we did," Sparks says, "without any foreign negotiator [and] no handshakes on the White House lawn."

To be sure, Palestinians and Israelis would not simply be able to take the new South Africa as a blueprint. They would have to work out their own distinct constitution, including mechanisms for ethnic communities to have autonomy in matters that concern them, and to guarantee that no one group can dominate another. There would be hard work to heal the terrible wounds of the past. Such a solution offers the chance that Palestine–Israel could become for the first time ever the truly safe home where Israelis and Palestinians can accept each other. It may be an arduous path, but in the current impasse we cannot afford to ignore any ray of light.



Printed with permission. Ali Abunimah is a Palestinian–American and the author of *One Country: A Bold Proposal to End the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict*.

Human Rights Watch must retract its shameful press release

by Norman G. Finkelstein

Even by the grim standards of Gaza, the past five months have been cruel ones.

Some four hundred Palestinians, mostly unarmed civilians, have been killed during Israeli attacks. (Four Israeli soldiers and two civilians have been killed.) Israel has sealed off Gaza from the outside world while the international community has imposed brutal sanctions, ravaging Gaza's already impoverished economy.

"Gaza is dying," Patrick Cockburn reported in *CounterPunch*, "its people are on the edge of starvation.A whole society is being destroyed.The sound that Palestinians most dread is an unknown voice on their cell phone saying they have half an hour to leave their home before it is hit by bombs or missiles. There is no appeal. "

"Gaza is in its worst condition ever," Gideon Levy wrote in *Ha'aretz*, "The Israeli army has been rampaging through Gaza--there's no other word to describe it--killing and demolishing, bombing and shelling indiscriminately....This is disgraceful and shocking collective punishment."

Predictably Gaza teetered on the precipice of fratricidal civil war. "The experiment was a success: The Palestinians are killing each other," Amira Hass wryly observed in *Ha'aretz*, "They are behaving as expected at the end of the extended experiment called 'what happens when you imprison 1.3 million human beings in an enclosed space like battery hens.'"

It is at times like this that we expect human rights organizations to speak out.

How has Human Rights Watch responded to the challenge? It criticized Israel for destroying Gaza's only electrical plant, and also called on Israel to "investigate" why its forces were targeting Palestinian medical personnel in Gaza and to "investigate" the Beit Hanoun massacre.

On the other hand, it accused Palestinians of committing a "war crime" after they captured an Israeli soldier and offered to exchange him for Palestinian women and children held in Israeli jails. (Israel was holding 10,000 Palestinians prisoner.) It demanded that Palestinians "bring an immediate end to the lawlessness and vigilante violence" in Gaza. (Compare Amira Hass's words.) It issued a 101-page report chastising the Palestinian Authority for failing to protect women and girls. It called on the Palestinian Authority to take "immediate steps to halt" Palestinian rocket attacks on Israel.

Were this record not shameful enough, HRW crossed a new threshold at the end of November.

After Palestinians spontaneously responded to that "unknown voice on a cell phone" by putting their own bare bodies in harm's way, HRW rushed to issue a press release warning that Palestinians might be committing a "war crime" and might be guilty of "human shielding." ("Civilians Must Not Be Used to Shield Homes Against Military Attacks")

In what must surely be the most shocking statement ever issued by a human rights organization, HRW indicted Palestinian leaders for supporting this nonviolent civil disobedience:

Prime Minister Haniyeh and other Palestinian leaders should be renouncing, not embracing, the tactic of encouraging civilians to place themselves at risk.

The international community has for decades implored Palestinian leaders to forsake armed struggle in favor of nonviolent civil disobedience. Why is a human rights organization now attacking them for adopting this tactic?

Is it a war crime to protect one's home from collective punishment?

Is it human shielding if a desperate and forsaken populace chooses to put itself at deadly risk in order to preserve the last shred of its existence?

Indeed, although Israeli soldiers have frequently used Palestinians as human shields in life-threatening situations, and although HRW has itself documented this egregious Israeli practice, HRW has never once called it a war crime.

It took weeks before HRW finally issued a report condemning Israeli war crimes in Lebanon. Although many reliable journalists were daily documenting these crimes, HRW said it first had to conduct an independent investigation of its own.

But HRW hastened to deplore the nonviolent protests in Gaza based on anonymous press reports which apparently got crucial facts wrong.

Why this headlong rush to judgment?

Was HRW seeking to appease pro-Israel critics after taking the heat for its report documenting Israeli war crimes in Lebanon?

After Martin Luther King delivered his famous speech in 1967 denouncing the war in Vietnam, mainstream Black leaders rebuked him for jeopardizing the financial support of liberal whites. "You might get yourself a foundation grant," King retorted, "but you won't get yourself into the Kingdom of Truth."

HRW now also stands poised at a crossroads: foundation grants or the Kingdom of Truth?

A first step in the right direction would be for it to issue a retraction of its press release and an apology.

HRW executive director Kenneth Roth "commended" Israel during its last invasion for warning people in south Lebanon to flee--before turning it into a moonscape, slaughtering the old, infirm and poor left behind. It would seem that Palestinian leaders and people, too, merit some recognition for embracing the tactics of Gandhi and King in a last desperate bid to save themselves from annihilation.

Email HRW Middle East director Sarah Leah Whitson--whitsos@hrw.org - and HRW executive director Kenneth Roth--RothK@hrw.org.

Norman Finkelstein's most recent book is Beyond Chutzpah: On the misuse of anti-Semitism and the abuse of history *(University of California Press). His web site is* www.NormanFinkelstein.com.

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Falling in line on Israel

by Stephen Zunes

The election of a Democratic majority in the House and Senate is unlikely to result in any serious challenge to the Bush administration's support for Israeli attacks against the civilian populations of its Arab neighbors and the Israeli government's ongoing violations of international humanitarian law.

The principal Democratic Party spokesmen on foreign policy will likely be Tom Lantos in the House of Representatives and Joe Biden in the Senate, both of whom have been longstanding and outspoken supporters of a series of right-wing Israeli governments and opponents of the Israeli peace movement. And, despite claims—even within the progressive press—that future House Speaker Nancy Pelosi is a "consistent supporter of human rights," such humanitarian concerns have never applied to Arabs, since she is a staunch defender of right-wing Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and his predecessor Ariel Sharon.

For example, when President George W. Bush defended Israel's assaults on Lebanon's civilian infrastructure this summer and defied the international community by initially blocking United Nations efforts to impose a cease-fire, the Democrats rushed to pass a resolution commending him for "fully supporting Israel." The resolution, co-authored by Rep. Lantos, claimed that Israel's actions were legitimate self-defense under the UN Charter and challenged the credibility of reputable human rights groups. Although groups like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch documented widespread attacks by Israeli forces against civilians in areas far from any Hezbollah military activity, the resolution praised "Israel's longstanding commitment to minimizing civilian loss and welcom[ed] Israel's continued efforts to prevent civilian casualties." All but 15 of the House's 201 Democrats voted in support.

Similarly, the Democrats echoed President Bush's support for Israel's 2002 offensive in the West Bank in another resolution co-authored by Lantos. In response to Amnesty International's observation that the massive assault appeared to be aimed at the Palestinian population as a whole, all but two dozen Democrats went on record supporting the devastating Israeli offensive and claiming that it was "aimed solely at the terrorist infrastructure."

In March 2003, Pelosi and other Democratic leaders signed a letter to President Bush opposing the White House-endorsed Middle East "Road Map" for peace, which they perceived as being too lenient on the Palestinians. The authors insisted that the peace process must be based "above all" on the end of Palestinian violence and the establishment of a new Palestinian leadership, not an end to Israeli occupation and colonization of Palestinian land seized in the 1967 war. Indeed, there was no mention of any of the reciprocal actions called for in the Road Map—not ending Israel's sieges and military assaults on Palestinian population centers and not halting the construction of additional illegal settlements. The letter also voiced opposition to the UN or any government other than the United States monitoring progress on the ground.

The Democrats have attacked the International Court of Justice for its landmark 2004 ruling calling for the enforcement of the Fourth Geneva Convention in Israeli-occupied territories. In a resolution that summer, the Democratic leadership and the overwhelming majority of Democrats in both houses also condemned the World Court's near-unanimous advisory opinion that Israel's separation barrier could not be built beyond Israel's internationally-recognized border into the occupied West Bank in order to incorporate illegal settlements into Israel.

More recently, Pelosi and other Democratic leaders have condemned former President Jimmy Carter's newly-released book criticizing Israeli violations of international humanitarian law in the West Bank. Carter's use of the word "apartheid" in reference to Israeli policies of building Jewish-only settlements and highways on confiscated Palestinian land and allowing Palestinians to enter only as laborers with special passbooks proved particularly inflammatory to Pelosi and her colleagues. Meanwhile, they have refused to criticize this policy by any name and insist that the Israeli colonial outposts in the occupied territories—constructed in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention and a series of UN Security Council resolutions—are legitimate.

> Until the progressive community seriously challenges Democratic hawks, there is little hope that the new Democratic majority can be expected to contribute anything to the cause of peace and justice in the Middle East.

Ongoing talks between Fatah and Hamas for a coalition government have raised the hope that the Palestinian Authority will soon have a non-Hamas prime minister and a largely non-partisan, technocratic cabinet. However, the Democrats support Bush's policy of refusing to resume normal relations with the PA unless the cabinet excludes members of Hamas or any party that does not recognize Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state. By contrast, no prominent Democrat has raised any concerns over Olmert's recent appointment of Avignor Lieberman, who has called for the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians from Israel and much of the West Bank, as a cabinet minister and his new deputy prime minister.

The Democrats have also pushed for increasing US military aid to Israel and have rejected calls to condition the aid on an improvement in Israel's human rights record. The Democrats have also pushed for an increase in economic assistance to Israel's rightist government, already the recipient of nearly one-third of all U.S. foreign aid, despite the country's relative affluence and the fact that Israelis represent only one-tenth of 1% of the world's population.

The decision by Democratic members of Congress to take such hard-line positions against international law and human rights does not stem from the fear that it would jeopardize their re-election. Polls show that a sizable majority of Americans believe U.S. foreign policy should support these principles. More specifically, regarding Israel and Palestine , majorities support a more even-handed US policy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and oppose the blank check given by the United States to Israel .

Nor is it a matter of Democratic lawmakers somehow being forced against their will to back Bush's policy by Jewish voters and campaign contributors. In reality, Jewish public opinion is divided over the wisdom and morality of many Israeli policies endorsed by the Democrats, recognizing that such policies actually harm Israel's legitimate long-term security interests. Furthermore, the vast majority of Democrats who support Bush's Middle East policies come from very safe districts where a reduction in campaign contributions would not have a negative impact on Democratic re-election. Contrary to the belief that it is political suicide to condemn the policies of the Israeli government, every single Democrat who opposed this summer's resolution in support of the Israeli assault on Lebanon was re-elected by a larger margin than in 2004.

Perhaps more damaging than pressure from right-wing PACs has been the absence of pressure from progressive groups that oppose Israeli policies. Indeed, some of the most hard-line Democratic opponents of Israeli peace and human rights groups were endorsed by leading US peace and human rights groups.

Until the progressive community seriously challenges Democratic hawks, there is little hope that the new Democratic majority can be expected to contribute anything to the cause of peace and justice in the Middle East.

Originally published on November 18, 2006 by Foreign Policy in Focus. Reprinted here with permission. Stephen Zunes is a professor of Politics at the University of San Francisco and the author of Tinderbox: US Middle East Policy and the Roots of Terrorism *(Common Courage Press). He serves as Middle East editor of Foreign Policy In Focus. Copyright © 2006 Foreign Policy in Focus.*

Letter from Jed Whittaker

Thank you for voting for me (you know who you are). You might be wondering why the convential media has reported that 100% of the vote went to Congressman Brian Baird and Michael Messmore. You might be wondering if your vote was counted. In fact your vote was not counted. Washington elections law does not allow it. Specifically, unless a write-in vote total is statistically relevant and could determine the outcome of an election, according to Washington election law, it will not be counted.

Wait a minute, you say. Aren't *all* the votes supposed to be counted? Isn't this America? You're right. All the votes are supposed to be counted, and this is America. The ideals set forth by the framers of the United States Constitution are ideals that we have yet to achieve. We must work to achieve those ideals.

Accordingly I am attempting a major revision of Washington election law, and will be building a coalition in support of the revision. If you want representative democracy in Washington, and you want your vote to be counted, please contact your state Representatives and Senators. Ask them to sponsor the omnibus election bill, a work in progress.

Peace.

Jed Whittaker was an independent, anti-war write-in candidate in the recent race in the 3rd Congressional District.

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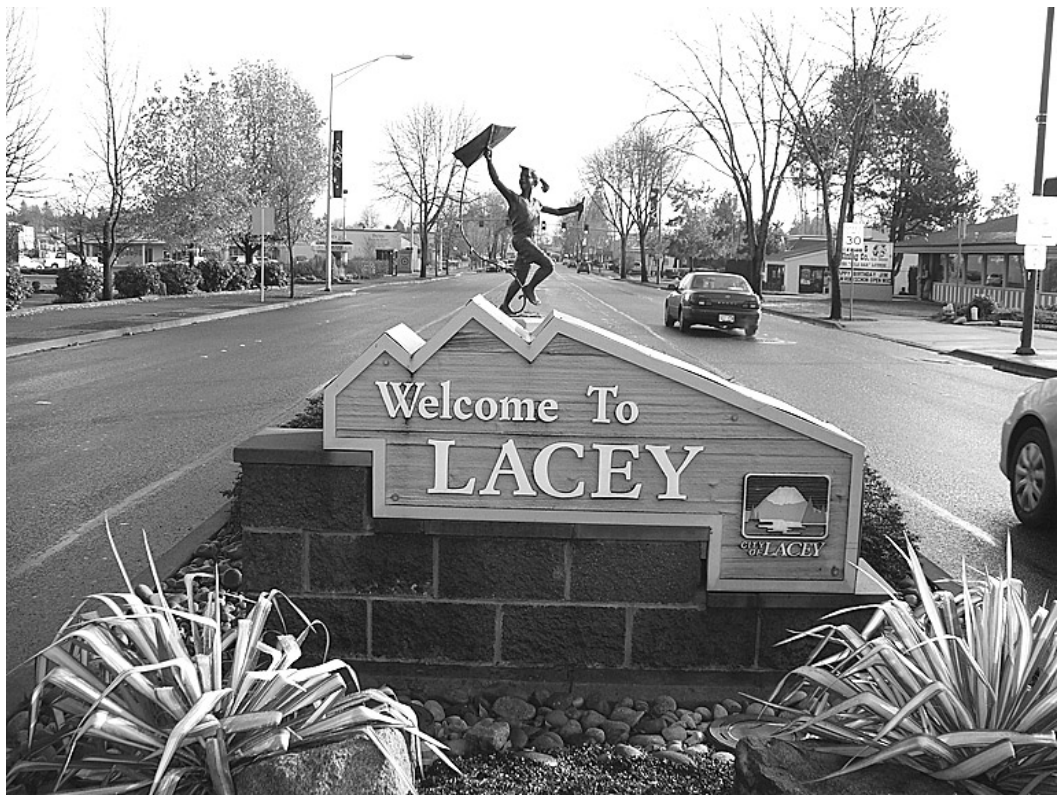

If we can't sit on the sidewalks, at least let us fly kites in the street like they do in Lacey. Read about the *Olympian*'s bright idea on page 5.

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